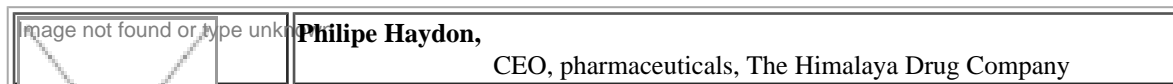


'We aim to capitalize on our strength in ayurveda'

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With the launch of HiOwna-Jr, a prescription-based nutritional supplement for kids in June, the 82 year old Himalaya Drug company made its foray into the rapidly growing nutraceutical space. Leading this strategic expansion drive, from the front, is Philippe Haydon, CEO, pharmaceuticals, who has been with the Himalaya Drug company for more than 30 years. Haydon began his career at Himalaya in 1979 as a medical representative and has since assumed several positions within the company, culminating in his present role as CEO. In an email interview with *BioSpectrum*, Haydon speaks about the foray into nutraceuticals, the positioning of ayurvedic products in the pharmaceutical space and his plans for the future.

What are the upcoming products in the HiOwna range?

Q Haydon: For the last three years, scientists at our research and development (R&D) center have been working on a range of nutri-health products that will offer clear therapeutic benefits. HiOwna-Jr. is the first in the series to be developed and launched.

HiOwna-Jr., which is recommended for children between the ages of two and 10, is fortified with 13 essential

vitamins and nine minerals. It has ragi (finger millet) that improves nutritive status, maricha (black pepper), a bio-availability enhancer, mandukaparni (centella), a cerebral activator, also known as 'brain food' in ayurveda and amalaki (Indian gooseberry), an immunity enhancer and the richest source of vitamin C in nature.

HiOwna-Jr. also has the distinct advantage of being the only health supplement in India to contain pea-protein, a natural vegetable, easy to digest protein, that has an essential amino acid profile very close to the ideal protein required for human nutrition, as recommended by the WHO and FAO. It also contains colostrum, which fortifies the immune system.

At present how would you describe Himalaya's reach among doctors in India?

Q Haydon: Himalaya already has a considerable equity with doctors and we enjoy their confidence being a R&D driven company. HiOwna-Jr. will be marketed by around 650 medical representatives, who will reach out to doctors across the country. Currently, Himalaya's products are prescribed by over four lakh doctors globally. We realize this might result in us losing out a larger market share as compared to over-the-counter supplements, but we will continue to use this route for most of the upcoming products, as we believe that a doctor is in the best position for prescribing health supplements after understanding the specific needs of the patient.

Additionally, we will be hosting small-scale events in cities across India, focusing on the issue of fussy eating, which is a growing problem among urban kids today. The events will provide a platform for doctors and parents to engage with each other and discuss ways to tackle the problem of selective eating.

Please elaborate about the R&D efforts spent in the production of the HiOwna line?

Q Haydon: Research and development lies at the core of Himalaya. We carry out extensive research before launching any product in the market. During the development process of HiOwna-Jr., we drew on our vast knowledge of herbs widely known in ayurveda for promoting child health. Like all pharmaceutical products at Himalaya, HiOwna-Jr. was developed following all allopathic protocols, including clinical trials. The entire process, from initial research to product launch, has taken us three years.

Are there any plans for making nutraceuticals a separate division at Himalaya altogether?

Q Haydon: Yes. Over the next two to three years, we intend to build the HiOwna brand into a 100 crore business. Eventually, we will have a separate business vertical exclusively focused on nutritional and health products for children and people of different age groups, addressing their different conditions.

What are your views on the Asia Pacific market? Apart from India where does Himalaya have a good market penetration?

Q Haydon: Thanks to the presence of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), herbal products are readily accepted there. However, in developed markets like Singapore, traditional products are often not accepted on face value. Customers seek well-researched alternative medicine that has been scientifically proven.

This is where Himalaya comes in. During the development process at Himalaya, pharmaceutical products undergo years of research. The drugs are formulated adhering to allopathic protocols, which include mutagen and toxicity tests and clinical trials. Hence, Himalaya is faring exceedingly well in this region.

How would you describe the regulatory scenario in India for the introduction of new products?

Q Haydon: Department of Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) is the licensing authority for registration of herbal products in India. As we develop products in Bangalore, we have to register our products with AYUSH monitoring body in Karnataka (state-level).

A team of experts, who exclusively look into the licensing and registration of the products at Himalaya apply for license adhering to the protocol set by state AYUSH. As a standard procedure, along with the products, we present published research papers during registration.

What would you say is your major challenge in expanding the pharmaceutical business in India?

Q Haydon: As we operate in the space of ayurveda, overcoming skepticism surrounding herbal medicine among the medical fraternity was a challenge for us. But, this perception is now changing. Extensive research has been carried out about the benefits of herbal medicine, which is slowly gaining global acceptance.

Due to a lack of stringent regulatory policies and a large number of unorganized players in the herbal segment, product quality was being jeopardized. But, in the last 10 years, AYUSH has been instrumental in implementing strict policies for product registration and distribution, which has benefited the segment greatly. In fact, Himalaya is credited with bringing about a change in ayurvedic herbal medicine in India. We are the first company to manufacture phytopharmaceutical products in an EU-GMP compliant facility, a testament to our commitment to quality.

What would be the focus areas for the pharmaceutical segment at Himalaya for the next two years?

Q Haydon: In the next couple of years, we are planning to launch more nutri-health products. Health supplements for general health, convalescence, diabetes management and a fourth variant for pregnant and lactating women will be launched shortly. Apart from nutraceuticals, we are also focusing on developing products for the dermatological, immunomodulation and women's health segments

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